destruction, there is a great need for T cell-reactive peptides which can desensitize patients against the self antigen that is activating the T cells responsible for the inflammatory process.

It is an object of the invention to provide peptides which are able to induce systemic immunological tolerance, more in particular specific T cell tolerance, to the responsible cartilage antigen in patients suffering from T cell-mediated cartilage destruction. It is another object of the invention to provide a method for detecting autoreactive T cells involved in the destruction of articular cartilage and test kits to be used in said method.

The present invention provides for such peptides.

In a first aspect of the invention there is provided for peptides consisting of 16 to 55 amino acid residues, said peptide comprising at least one of the amino acid sequences LVCYYTSWS (SEQ ID NO:60), FLCTHIIYS (SEQ ID NO:61), IIYSFANIS (SEQ ID NO:62), LKTLLSVGG (SEQ ID NO:63), FIKSVPPFL (SEQ ID NO:64), FDGLDLAWL (SEQ ID NO: 65), LYPGRRDKQ (SEQ ID NO:66), YDIAKISQH (SEQ ID NO:67), LDFISIMTY (SEQ ID NO:68), FISIMTYDF (SEQ ID NO:69), FRGQEDASP (SEQ ID NO:70), YAVGYMLRL (SEQ ID NO:71), MLRLGAPAS (SEQ ID NO:72), LAYYEICDF (SEQ ID NO:73), LRGATVHRT (SEQ ID NO:74), YLKDRQLAG (SEQ ID NO:75), LAGAMVWAL (SEQ ID NO:76), VWALDLDDF (SEQ ID NO:77) or LDLDDFQGS (SEQ ID NO:78).

In particular, the peptide according to the invention comprises at least one of the amino acid sequences YKLVCYYTSWSQYREG (SEQ ID NO:1), YTSWSQYREGDGSCFP (SEQ ID NO:2), LDRFLCTHIIYSFANI (SEQ ID NO:5), THIIYSFANISNDHID (SEQ ID NO:6), PNLKTLLSVGCWNFGS (SEQ ID NO:12), NTQSRRTFIKSVPPFL (SEQ ID

expression vectors are, amongst others, plasmids, cosmids, virusses and YAC's (Yeast Artificial Chromosomes) which comprise the necessary control regions for replication and expression. The expression vector can be brought to expression in a host cell. Suitable host cells are, for instance, bacteria, yeast cells and mammalian cells. Such techniques are well known in the art, see for instance Sambrooke et al, Molecular Cloning:a Laboratory Manual, Cold Spring Harbor laboratory Press, Cold Spring Harbor, 1989.

The peptides according to the invention are T-cell reactive peptides, which are recognized by and are able to stimulate activated, autoreactive T-cells. These autoreactive T cells are found in the blood of RA patients but rarely in healthy donors.

Thus, according to the invention the synthetic peptides, said peptides resembling the MHC Class II restricted T-cell epitopes present on the target autoantigen HC gp-39, are very suitable for use in a therapy to induce specific T-cell tolerance to HC gp-39 in mammals, more specifically humans, suffering from T-cell mediated cartilage destruction, such as for example arthritis, more specifically rheumatoid arthritis.

Although WO 95/01995 and WO 95/02188 describe the diagnostic use of HC gp-39 as a marker for RA, the arthritogenic nature of HC gp-39 is neither disclosed nor suggested. Nowhere do they hint or suggest towards the use of fragments of HC gp-39 or T-cell reactive peptides according to the present invention in the antigen or peptide specific therapy to induce T-cell specific tolerance to the HC gp-39 in the cartilage under attack.

According to the invention, patients suffering from T-cell mediated destruction of the articular cartilage can be treated with a therapeutical composition comprising one or more peptides